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# The Problem of Over-Churched and Unchurched and unchurched Areas in Miner County

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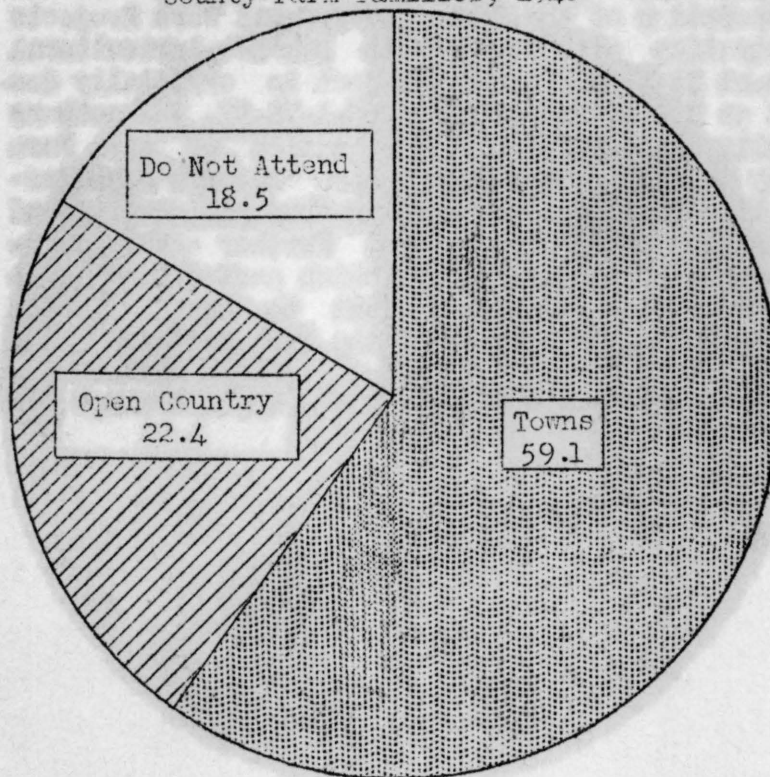
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THE PROBLEM OF OVER-CHURCHED  
and  
Unchurched Areas  
in  
Miner County

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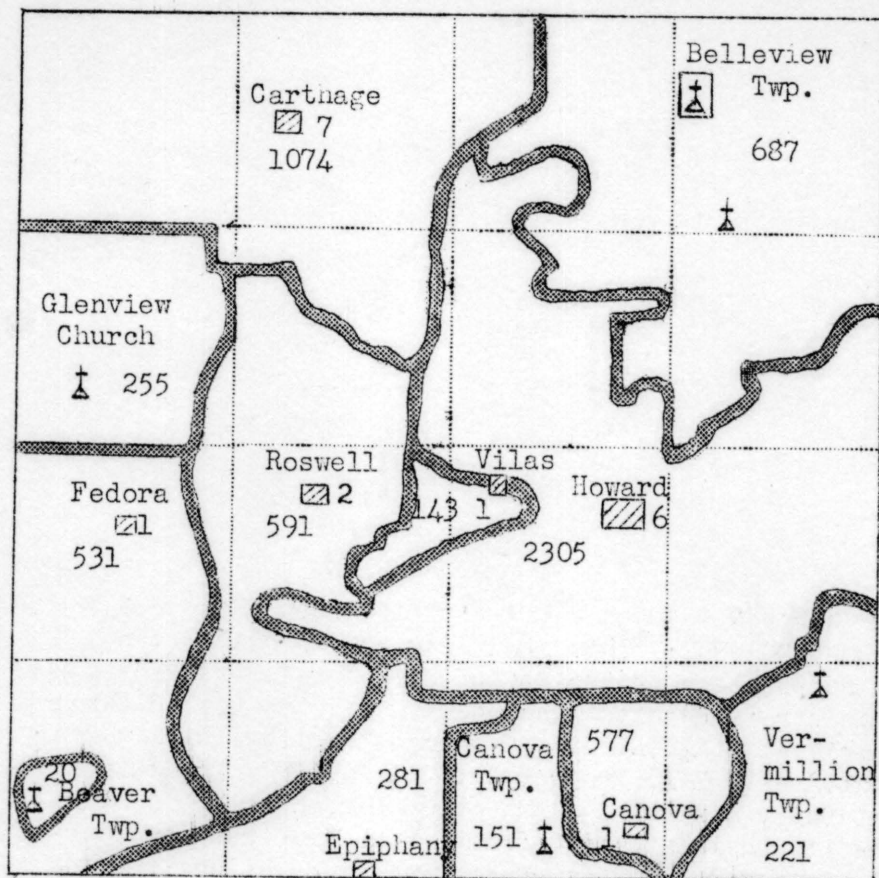
Place of Church Attendance of Miner  
County Farm Families, 1940



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\* worker in obtaining certain of the information. \*  
\*  
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Figure 1. Attendance Areas in Miner County of Village and Open Country Churches.



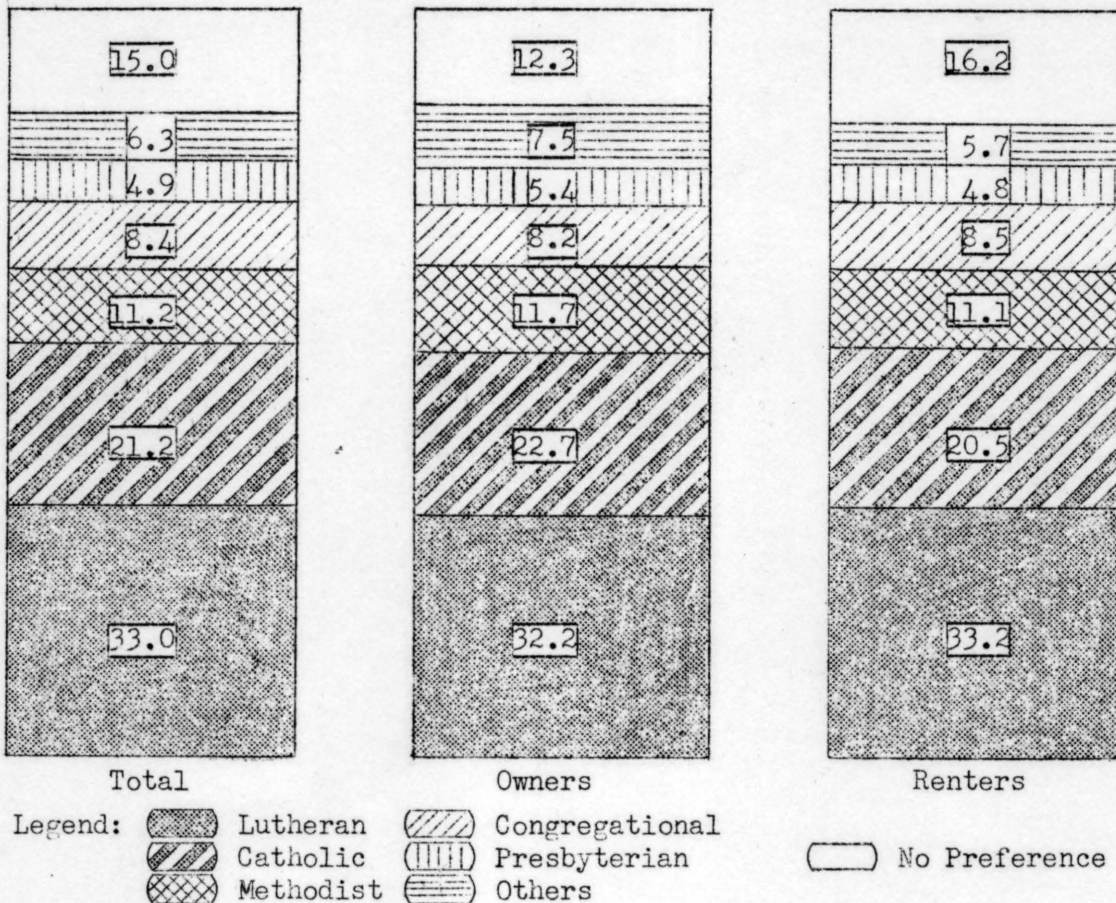
Legend:   
 + Open Country Churches   
 + Open Country Church with resident pastor   
 Trade centers with number of churches in each.   
 The number which appears within each church area is the total population of the area.

Figure 1 shows the attendance areas in Miner county of churches located in the county. It will be noted that churches in village centers serve larger country areas than do churches located in the open country. Six hundred and sixteen or approximately sixty percent of the 1043 farm families attended church in towns and villages. Two hundred and thirty-four (22.4 percent) attended open country churches, while one hundred and ninety-three families (18.5 percent) did not attend church.

Twenty-five churches were operating in Miner county in 1940, nineteen being located in the six towns and villages of the county and six being located in the country. Twenty-five families attended churches outside the county. Of the six open-country churches only one (Bellevue Township church) had a resident pastor. The others were being served by pastors from town or village churches. This fact, together with the limited membership and infrequency of services, makes for inadequacy in the programs of open-country churches. The population of each of the areas served by country churches is shown in Fig. 1 to be much too small to support an active church even though (and this situation is probably never realized) every one within the area was a church member.



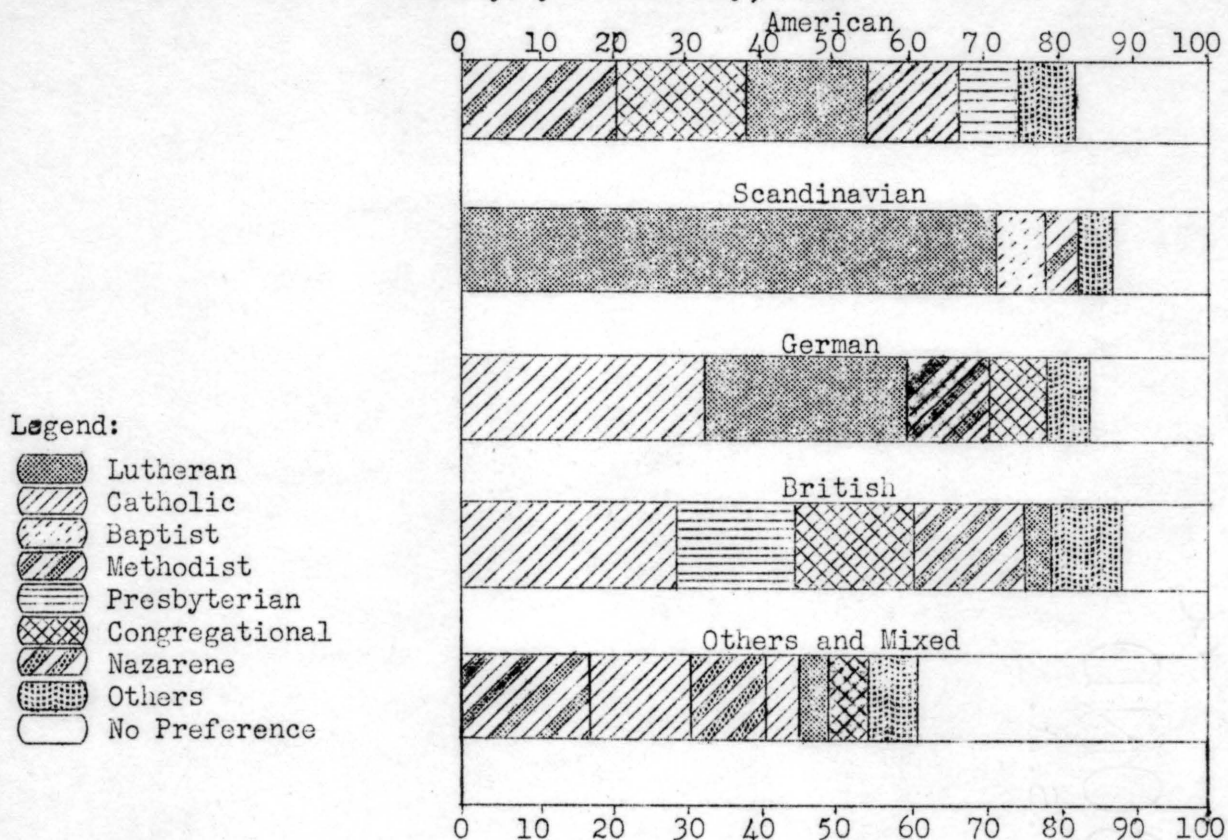
Figure 2. Denominational Preference of all Farm Household Heads in Miner County by Tenure Status, 1940



Of the 1,043 farm household heads in Miner county, 886, or 85 percent, expressed a preference for one of the various church denominations. One-third of all farm operators expressed a preference for the Lutheran church. The Catholic church was the choice of 21.2 percent. Eleven and two-tenths percent preferred the Methodist denomination, 8.4 percent chose the Congregational church and 4.9 percent expressed a preference for the Presbyterian church. Five other denominations were included in the remaining 6.3 percent who expressed a preference. Fifteen percent of all household heads expressed no preference.

A comparison of owners and renters reveals no significant differences with respect to the proportion expressing preference for the various denominational groups. The proportion of those expressing no preference was slightly larger in the renter group than in the owner group.

Figure 3. Denominational Preference of all Farm Household Heads in Miner County by Nationality, 1940



Nationality background is one of the chief factors influencing denominational choice. Miner county was settled by a large number of foreign-born people. Those of Scandinavian and German descent comprise over 70 percent of all household heads. In these groups there is a strong tendency to adhere to the dominant denominations of their native land. In the Scandinavian group the Lutheran church is the choice of almost three-fourths of all household heads. In the German group the Catholic church ranks slightly higher than the Lutheran with 33.1 percent and 26.8 percent respectively. In the British group the Catholic church ranks high with 29.2 percent while the percentage for the other denominations is quite evenly divided.

The American group is made up largely of the second, third and succeeding generations of these foreign-born people. It is significant to note that this group is more evenly divided among the various denominations. This is true also in the "others and mixed" group. In the latter group the proportion of those expressing no preference is higher; namely 39 percent. The tendency of this "mixed" group to express no preference is one of the problems of an unchurched population.

Table 1. Denominational Preferences of Miner County Farm Household Heads by percentages, 1940

Nationality	Lutheran	Cath- olic	Metho- dist	Presby- terian	Congre- gational	Baptist	Naza- rene	No Pref- erence	Others
American	15.5	11.5	20.9	8.1	17.6	-	-	18.9	7.5
Scandinavian	72.2	-	4.3	-	-	6.2	-	11.6	5.7
German	26.8	33.1	10.8	-	7.6	-	-	15.2	6.5
British	3.5	29.2	14.9	15.8	14.9	-	-	12.6	9.1
Others and Mixed	4.4	13.1	17.3	4.4	4.4	-	8.7	39.0	8.7

Figure 4. Predominant Nationalities and Denominations by townships, Miner County, 1940.

(Red Stone)	(Carthage)	(Grafton)	(Bellevue)
Mixed Mixed	Scand. 43.8 Luth. 56.1	Scand. 49.0 Luth. 52.8	Scand. 57.1 Luth. 64.3
(Miner)	(Green Valley)	(Adams)	(Henden)
Mixed Cong. 60.3	Ger. 42.9 Mixed	Ger. 49.3 Mixed	Mixed Luth. 63.0
(Clinton)	(Roswell)	(Howard)	(Clearwater)
Mixed Presby. 42.9	Ger. 49.2 Meth. 47.5	Ger. 67.2 Cath. 55.2	Ger. 60.5 Luth. 48.1
(Beaver)	(Rock Creek)	(Canova)	(Vermillion)
Mixed Mixed	Ger. 63.6 Cath. 67.5	Ger. 71.1 Luth. 40.8	Mixed Mixed

Legend:

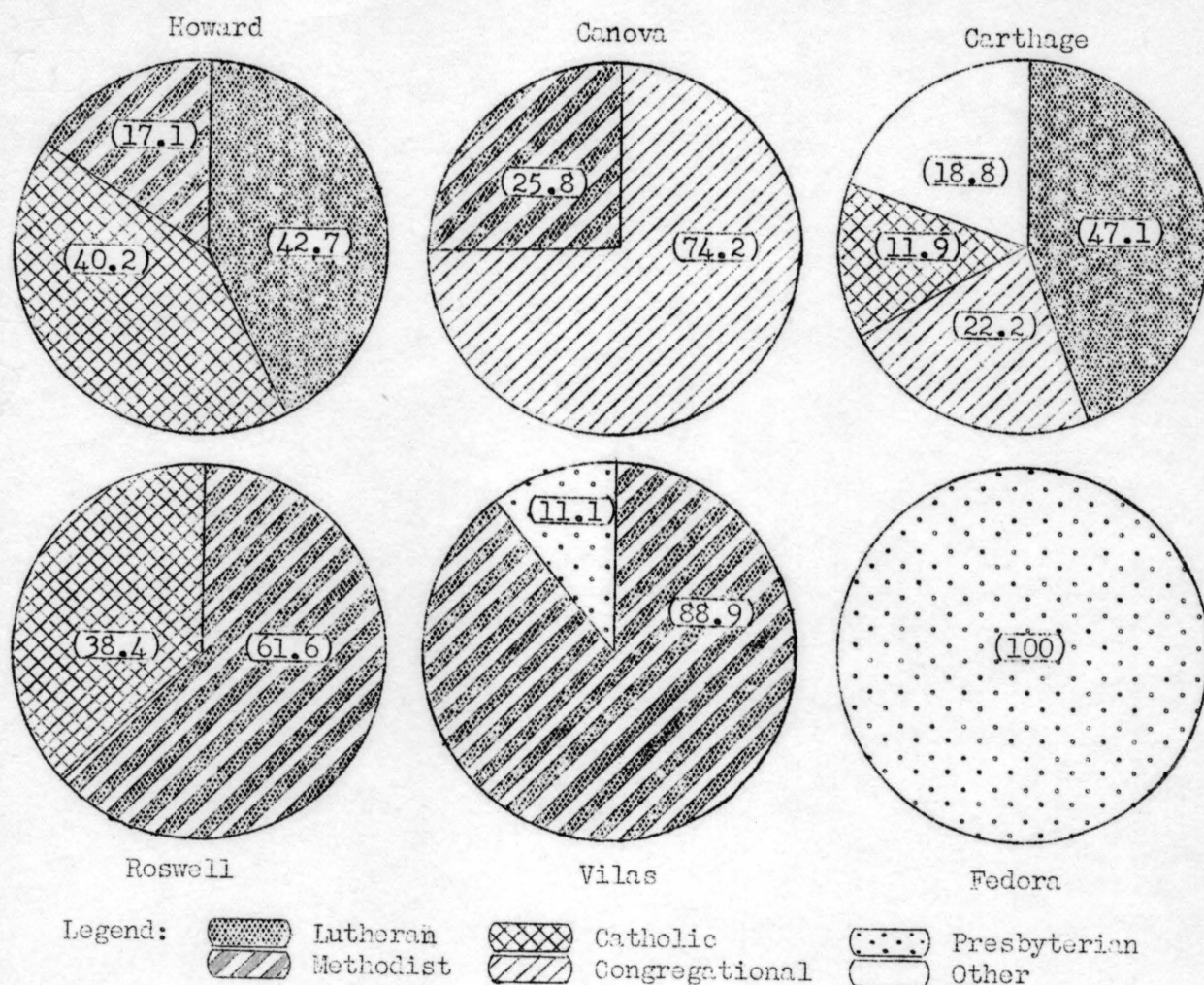
Top line indicates nationality percentage  
 Bottom line indicates denomination percentage  
 "Mixed" means that no nationality or denomination  
 has more than 20% dominance.

Figure 4 shows again the relationship which has been seen to exist between nationality and denominational preference. In this chart the predominant nationality and denomination are given for each township of Miner county in which one nationality and one denomination clearly dominate (to be considered dominant, nationality and denomination were required to have at least 20 percent more members than any other single nationality or denomination). The percentage figures indicate the proportion which the farm household heads of the predominant nationality and denomination were of all household heads in the township.

Of the sixteen townships in Miner county it will be noted that the German nationality predominates in seven and the Scandinavian in three, while the remaining six have mixed populations. In the three townships in which the Scandinavians dominate the Lutheran church is also dominant. The Lutheran church is dominant in two of the townships in which the German nationality predominates; the Catholic church is dominant in two; the Methodist church in one; while in the other two no church predominates. The Congregational church dominates in one of the six townships of mixed nationality, the Presbyterian in one, the Lutheran in one and in three no denomination predominates.



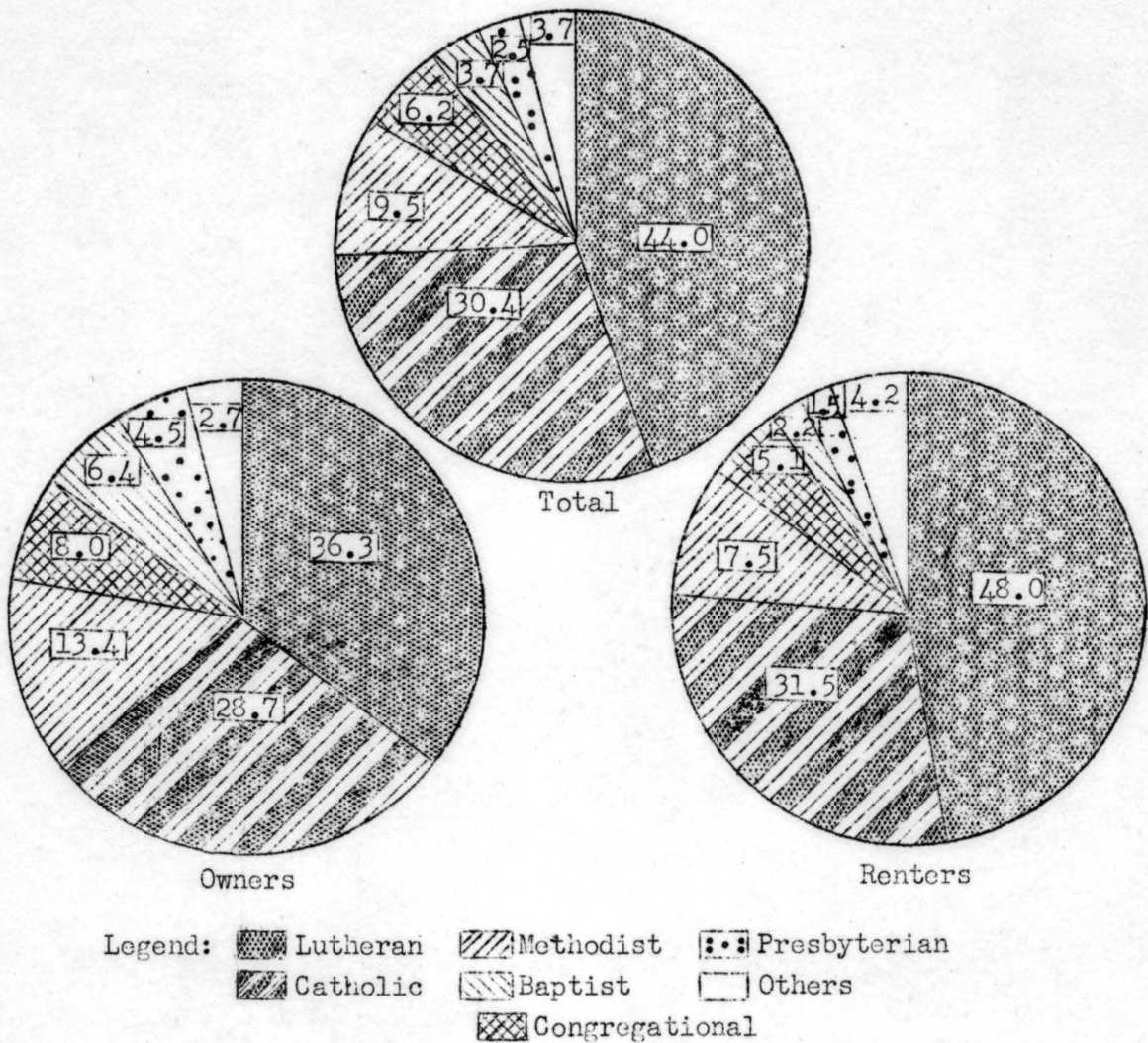
Figure 5. Church Preference of Farm Families in Miner County Towns, 1940



Approximately 60 percent of all farm households in Miner county attend church in town centers. Figure 5 shows the denominational preference of farm families attending church in the various towns of Miner county. In two of these villages, Roswell and Vilas, a large percentage attended the Methodist church. In Fedora the attendance was 100 percent Presbyterian. In Canova the Congregational church drew approximately three-fourths of all church attendance. In Howard 42.7 percent attended the Lutheran church, 40.2 percent attended the Catholic church and 17.1 percent attended the Methodist church. In Carthage the Lutheran church led with 47.1 percent, the Congregational church drew 22.2 percent, the Catholic church had 11.9 percent and 18.8 percent attended the other churches.



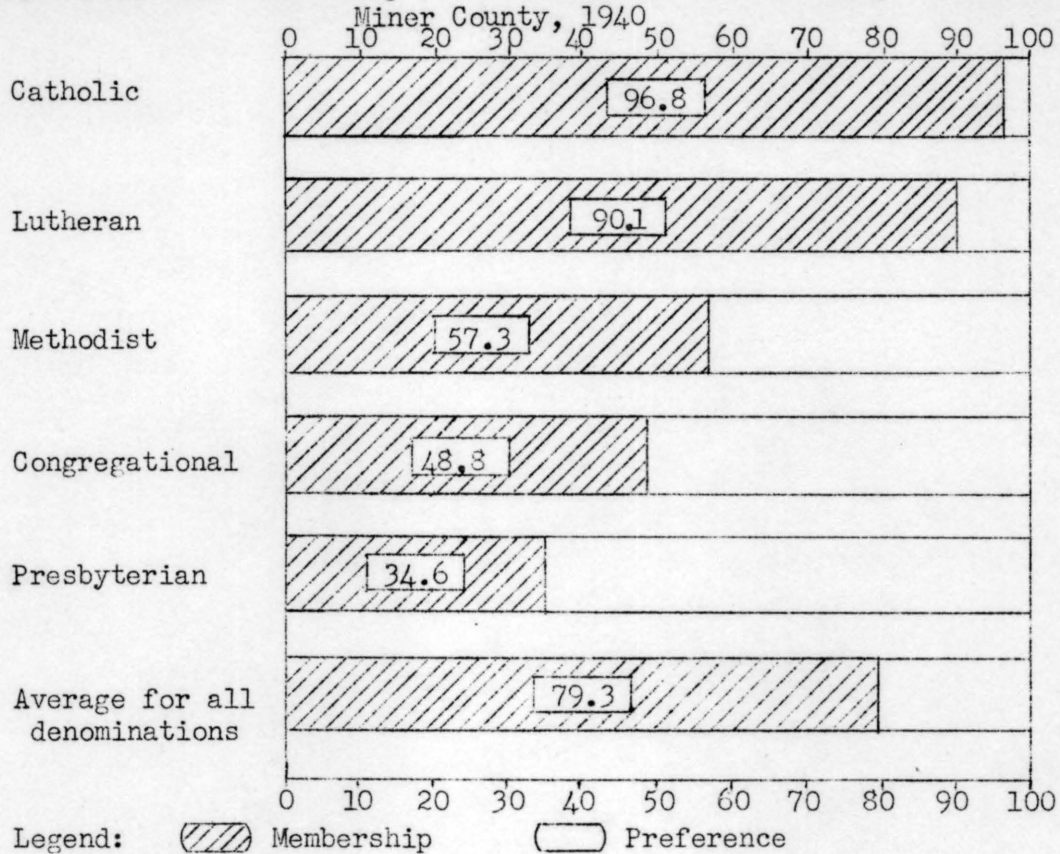
Figure 6. Church Membership of Farm Household Heads in Miner County, 1940



Not all of those expressing church preference in Miner county are church members. Of the 886 farm household heads, 703 or 78 percent were members of some denomination. Ninety six and three-tenths percent of these were enrolled in one of the following six major denominations: Lutheran, Catholic, Methodist, Congregational, Baptist and Presbyterian. Forty-four percent of all members belonged to the Lutheran church; 30.4 percent to the Catholic church; 9.5 percent to the Methodist church; 6.2 percent to the Congregational church; 3.7 percent to the Baptist church; and 2.5 percent to the Presbyterian church.

Both Lutheran and Catholic churches had a higher percentage of membership in the renter group than in the owner group. Forty-eight percent of the renters were members of the Lutheran church as compared to 36.3 percent of the owners. Thirty one and five-tenths percent of the renters were members of the Catholic church as compared to 28.7 percent of the owners. On the other hand, the Methodist church enrolled 13.4 percent of all owners and 7.5 percent of all renters. The percentage for the Congregational, Baptist and Presbyterian churches was slightly higher in the owner group than in the renter group.

Figure 7. Ratio of Membership to Preference for Leading Denominations,



As previously noted 703 or 78 percent of all farm household heads in Miner county expressed a denominational preference. Seven hundred and fifty six of these, or 79.3 percent are church members. The ratio of membership to preference varies greatly between the various denominations. The Catholic church ranks high with an enrollment of 96.8 percent of those expressing preference. Ninety and one-tenth percent of all household heads expressing preference for the Lutheran church are members of that denomination. In the Methodist church, however, the ratio of membership to preference is only 57.3 percent; in the Congregational church the ratio is 48.8 percent; and in the Presbyterian church it is 34.6 percent.

The high percentage of membership in the Catholic and Lutheran churches may be largely explained by the membership policies and educational programs which these denominations sponsor. Children are taken into the church through baptism as infants and this is later reaffirmed by the child in the teen age. These churches carry on an intensive educational program for the children in catechism and church doctrine. In certain of the Protestant churches less emphasis is placed on membership and consequently many drift away from the church entirely. Others continue to state a preference for the church in which they were reared but fail to become members. This is especially true of those who move away from their home community.

Figure 8. Percentage of Farm Household Heads Expressing Preference and Having Church Membership, Miner County, 1940.

Redstone	Carthage	Grafton	Belleview
80.0	84.2	86.8	80.0
58.2	82.5	86.8	80.0
Miner	Green Valley	Adams	Henden
84.9	77.8	86.7	83.6
30.2	42.8	77.3	80.8
Clinton	Roswell	Howard	Clear Water
76.8	81.4	92.5	90.1
21.4	49.2	89.6	88.9
Beaver	Rock Creek	Canova	Vermillion
78.4	96.1	81.6	85.7
47.1	72.7	68.4	74.0

Legend: Top figure - Preference  
Lower figure - Membership

Figure 8 shows the percentage of farm household heads in each township of Miner county who expressed a denominational preference, along with the percentage who were members of some church. It will be noted that in two of the townships all those expressing a church preference are church members.

A number of townships, however, principally Clinton, Miner, Green Valley, Roswell, and Beaver, appear to be rather seriously unchurched by virtue of the low percentage of membership among household heads. Farm families in these areas are apparently not being adequately served at present. This situation does not call for the organization of new churches in open country areas. In fact the existence of weak country churches with necessarily inadequate programs often serves as a deterrent to church membership and participation. Finances are inadequate and the program is often too weak and limited to attract new members. With improved methods of transportation the town churches, which already serve six-tenths of the farm families of Miner county, are within easy reach of all farm areas and are in a much better position to appeal to the unchurched. It is probable that a concerted effort on the part of these town congregations would bring in many of these farm families who do not belong to, or attend, any church.



## Suggestions for Solving the Problems of Over-churched and Unchurched Areas in Miner County

The National Home Missions Council recommends a ratio of one church per thousand of the population. On this basis Miner county with a population of 6,836 and 25 churches is distinctly over-churched. At the same time large numbers of Miner county residents are not availing themselves of church membership or attendance, thus indicating the existence of unchurched areas. The following suggestions are made for solving the problems of over-churched and unchurched areas in Miner county.

### I. Town Areas

Paradoxical as it may seem, over-churching in towns is partially responsible for an unchurched condition there. Either over-churching within a denomination or denominational overlapping has the effect of reducing adequate financial support. Without sufficient finances it is impossible for a church to maintain a program sufficiently vital to attract the unchurched. As C. Luther Fry has expressed it, "A weak and ineffectual church, like the abandoned church, is a burden upon religious faith. It is a feeble symbol (a dying epistle one might say, known and read of all men) that religion as there exemplified approaches impotence." Furthermore, the existence of a large number of small sects, each with a conflicting creed is apt to have a tendency to produce contempt for the Christian religion on the part of the unchurched. The first step, therefore, would be to cut down denominational overlapping by one of the following methods of comity:

- a. Denominational Exchange - This is an arrangement whereby two denominations agree to an exchange of churches in two different localities. Members of a weak church in a given locality agree to merge with a strong church in another denomination. In another locality the opposite process may be carried on within the same two denominations.
- b. Undenominational - In this type of union the uniting churches sever all connections with denominations.
- c. Federated - This is an arrangement whereby two or more denominations maintain a joint local worship but each of the united bodies continues to keep affiliation with its own denomination.
- d. Affiliated - When this type of union takes place, a loose connection is maintained for certain purposes with some one denomination.

### II. Country Areas

Since practically all farm families in Miner county live within easy driving distance, of town churches, the solution to the problem of reaching unchurched farm families will probably not be found in organizing additional open country churches. Town churches, which already serve two-thirds of the county's farm families, are in a better position by virtue of the better equipment and superior programs to interest the unchurched than are open country churches. However, it will probably be necessary for them to make special and well-planned efforts to appeal to the unchurched farm people if the latter are to be brought into the church. This might be done through visiting gospel teams, church-sponsored vacation Bible Schools in rural school buildings, country evangelistic services, and special "Rural Life Sunday" programs.